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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VATICAN 000104

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SUBJECT: IRAQ: CHALDEAN PATRIARCH SUPPORTS CHRISTIAN AREAS
REVITALIZATION CONCEPT

REF: 06 VATICAN 000226

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of
Mission, Embassy Vatican.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

1. (C) Summary: Monsignor Philip Najim, Representative of the Chaldean Catholic Church to the Holy See and the Chaldeans' European representative, told us June 25 that the Patriarch supports the idea of a revitalization plan for tradition Christian areas in northern Iraq. The Chaldeans, who remain opposed to the establishment of a Christian "Ghetto", envision a robust building and jobs program to attract Christians fleeing other areas in Iraq in an effort to save Iraq's Christian community. Efforts are underway in the US and Australia to recruit businesses to these Christian areas and the Chaldeans are seeking USG and NGO assistance to support their efforts. Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Albert Yelda supports the concept and has been in contact with key officials to promote the idea. End Summary.

Yes to Christian Area Revitalization

2. (C) Monsignor Philip Najim, the Chaldean Catholic Representative to the Holy See, told us June 25 that Patriarch Emmanuel Delly III supports the idea of revitalizing traditional Christian areas in Northern Iraq in an effort to stem the tide of Christian refugees fleeing Iraq. Drawing a clear distinction from the concept of a Christian "Ghetto" on the Niveveh Plains,

Najim explained the idea involved revitalizing traditional Christian areas in Northern Iraq with the goal of providing Christian families with a safe place to live and work.

No to Nineveh Ghetto

13. (C) Najim stressed that their support for this so called revitalization effort was not an about-face to their prior stated opposition to a Christian enclave on the Nineveh Plain. The concept of a Christian Ghetto is an idea which "we cannot support", said Najim. The Chaldean Church is for a united Iraq, where the rights of all Iraqis are protected including their constitutional right to live wherever they wish, said Najim. We are against the idea of internal partitions based on religion and categorically reject the idea of a Christian Ghetto because the terrorist would use the existence of a Christian Ghetto as another reason to oust Christians from their homes in other areas in Iraq. Additionally, without USG protection explained Najim, a Christian enclave would make a very inviting target for the terrorist. Najim also mentioned that the KRG would never support the establishment of a Christian enclave in or near Kurdistan because of certain problems, it would create for them.

If You Revitalize It, They Will Come

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14. (C) The basic concept underlying the revitalization idea is to reestablish traditional Christian communities in Northern Iraq through an energetic building and jobs program. Najim explained that there had existed a number of vibrant Christian communities throughout northern Iraq before Saddam had cleared these areas of Christians during his Arabization program. Rather than creating an exclusive enclave for Christians, Najim indicated Christians would have an option of returning to their ancestral homes as opposed to fleeing Iraq for Syria, Jordan or other countries.

15. (C) The Chaldean Church had established two committees, said Najim, one in the U.S. and one in Australia, to help recruit and establish businesses in the targeted areas in northern Iraq. We are also very interested in receiving support to build factories, schools and hospitals said Najim who indicated that they had received interest and offers of support from a number of NGOs including Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio. Najim added that they expected to continue to receive support from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) because the Kurds "want to show the world they are helping Christians."

"We Want America to Succeed"

¶6. (C) Najim then made a pitch for support from the USG in helping with this revitalization effort. "A vibrant and functioning Christian community in Iraq is in all of our best interests", said Najim (reftel A) and we would encourage the U.S. to provide its support to this effort. The Christian community in Iraq "wants America to succeed," said Najim, "and you have the political and financial wherewithal to help us succeed in this effort".

¶7. (C) The Patriarch will visit with Ambassador Crocker at Embassy Baghdad sometime later the week of June 24, said Najim. The Patriarch looks forward to explaining the revitalization idea to Ambassador Crocker. "We hope this will be the beginning of a successful effort to help the Christian people of Iraq", said Najim.

Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Supports Revitalization

¶8. (C) Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Albert Yelda told us June 27 that the revitalization idea has his support and he has already discussed the matter with the Chaldeans and a number of officials inside Iraq including KRG President Barzani. Yelda said he imagined the KRG would support a Christian-led administrative region in the north of Iraq, but they are absolutely against the establishment of a Christian enclave. The key is to attract factories or other business enterprises to the area, or there will be nothing to hold the Christians to Iraq.

Comment

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¶9. (C) The Chaldeans are clearly looking for a silver bullet to save their Church in Iraq and are hoping the so-called revitalization effort will save the day. While the concept is vague, this idea might just be worth lending direct or indirect support, especially if the KRG will support the concept. With Pope Benedict and the Catholic worldwide media paying more and more attention to the plight of Christians in Iraq, a little support might reap a bigger payoff.
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